

Mindlin, Valerie. "David Claerbout: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art." *Art Forum*. April 24, 2021.

ARTFORUM



David Claerbout, the "confetti" piece, 2015–2018, double-channel video projection, 3-D animation, silent, color.

The supplanting of the lens-based practices by the digital, David Claerbout proposes in his essay for the exhibition "Unseen Sound," sealed the fate of photography's claim to indexicality. What enters in its place, negating light-reliant media's promise of transparency, are what Claerbout refers to as the Dark Optics—an atavistic return to a pre-photographic Dark Ages when visual culture had no purchase on objectivity or veracity. The four video works that make up the exhibition test the vagaries of that early claim as much as the dangers of its successor.

An ambiguous pastiche of digitally manipulated video, *the "confetti" piece, 2015–2018*, brings to mind an election-themed Brooks Brothers catalog. A panoply of generic Aryan types frozen in mute jubilation—their homogeneity broken only by a lone, silently screaming Black child—are looped in an ambling succession of still frames, forming a background to the work's only moving element: a CGI splatter of confetti. In *Algiers' Sections of a Happy Moment, 2008*, *Sections of a Happy Moment, 2007*, and *The Quiet Shore, 2011*, sequences of black-and-white images of families at leisure tease the viewer to imagine a *La Jetée*-like narrative while denying any cathartic foothold for interpretation. All of the pieces are displayed in the same room, bound together by anesthetic atonal muzak. The perfect soundtrack to one's bored musings in a hotel lobby, it suggests both a knowing exacerbation of photography's mnemonic promise and a deconstructive slashing of the narrative cinema's emotional manipulation through musical cues. How strange it is, Claerbout seems to suggest, to take someone's "having been there" as an emotional anchor—yet how disconcerting not to be able to.